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ABSTRACT

In order to help students in oral interpretation or English classes comprehend the literature they read, this document outlines a question-answer-rehearse procedure which resolves the paradox of understanding before they perform a text. The twenty questions, formulated to provide a solid foundation for later explication and deeper study, are stated briefly for teacher overview. In the section written to students, the questions are restated in complete form with suggested explanations for each question. The document concludes with a glossary of literary terms and an analysis of a poem by Emily Dickinson using these twenty questions. (JM)

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TWENTY QUESTIONS

TO THE PUZZLE OF MEANING IN LITERATURE

FOR THE

ORAL INTERPRETER

by

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05 501 320

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TWENTY QUESTIONS TO THE PUZZLE OF MEANING IN LITERATURE FOR THE ORAL INTERPRETER

Introduction to the Teacher

Since students rarely enter oral interpretation or English classes with anything like a thorough grounding in literary study, teachers must find ways of helping them comprehend the literature they read. The questions posed in these pages, if answered by students in written form, and demonstrated by their oral practice, can help students enter the horizons of the text's meaning. Understanding meaning is not only complex, but, as Richard E. Palmer puts it, paradoxical. The process of coming to understand, he writes, is a "puzzling paradox."

> In order to read, it is necessary to understand in advance what will be said, and yet this understanding must come from the reading. . . . Oral interpretation thus has two sides: it is necessary to understand something in order to express it, yet understanding itself comes from an interpretive reading -- expression.[1]

If students will follow the process of answering a question on paper, and then will read the text aloud, the question-answer-rehearse-question-answer-rehearse procedure resolves the puzzling paradox by which students must understand before they can perform a text, and yet cannot understand <u>until</u> they perform. The results are achieved by a process in which "partial understanding is used to understand still further," writes Palmer, "like using pieces of a puzzle to figure out what is missing."[2]

Developed over a period of fifteen years of use with students

in beginning oral interpretation classes reading all genres of literature, these twenty questions help students grasp the menaing of a text. The questions are stated in truncated form below to give teachers a quick overview, and then, in the section written to students, are restated in their complete form. Suggested explanations are presented for each question. At the conclusion of the questions and their explanation, is a glossary of literary terms, and an analysis of a poem by Emily Dickinson using these twenty questions.

Twenty Questions In Short Form

Questions dealing with the situation in the text:

1. What is the speaker's point of view?
2. How truthful is the speaker?
3. Who performs the major action?
4. Who is listening to the speaker?
5. What is the setting?
6. What is the time?
7. What is the subject?
8. What are the attitudes of author and speaker?

Questions dealing with the structure of the text:

9. What are the key lines?
10. How does the title function?
11. What is the organization?
12. Where is the crisis, climax, and denouement?

Questions dealing with the language in the text:

13. What level of language is used?
14. What are the definitions of unfamiliar words?
15. What allusions are used?
16. What figures of speech are used?

17. What sensory impressions are used?

18. What sound values are used?

Questions dealing with the summation of the text:

19. What do you know about the writer?

20. What is the writer saying about the human condition?

Why twenty questions? If too few questions are asked of students, they may founder in generalities about the literature because they have no tools to aid them in the analysis. If too many questions are asked, the very length and detail may keep them from comprehending the selection's unity. In their first course in oral interpretation, students need to make a start toward an experience with literature that will give a solid foundation for later explication and deeper study. These twenty questions, if faithfully answered in written form, and then demonstrated in vocal and bodily expression, can give that foundation.

Introduction to Students of Oral Interpretation and English

Because you want to read literature aloud, you are regarding literature as an act by someone wishing to say something to someone, rather than as an artifact to be admired as a beautiful, but inert, object. Looking at literature in this way, as a speech act, implies a dynamic, rather than a passive, relationship between you, the literature and your audience. You will find that you cannot appreciate the act of literature unless you read it aloud, and that you cannot read it aloud effectively unless you continually work at understanding its words. The more thoroughly you understand a work of literature, the better will you interpret it aloud; the more you interpret the work aloud, the better you will understand it. If you have read aloud before, you will remember those flashes of insight when you said, after reading aloud a particular

passage, "Oh, now I know what that means!" And you may have experienced the same insightful reaction when you puzzled out a meaning on paper.

The best way to prepare to read literature aloud is to ask yourself each of the key questions listed on the pages that follow and then read your selection aloud to see how your performance is enhanced by your understanding of the answer. If you will read the selection aloud each time you answer a question, you will both see how the previous answer has helped with your understanding, and have an insight into possible answers to the next key question. The circularity of the question-answer-rehearse-question-answer-rehearse procedure will help you respond to the literature. None of the questions has a "yes" or "no" answer. Each question requires your thoughtful placing of its part into the puzzle of meaning. The questions are divided into categories of situation, structure, language, and summation to help organize your thinking. At the end of the questions you will find a glossary of literary terms used in the questions and a sample analysis.

Twenty Questions to the Puzzle of Meaning of Literature for the Oral Interpretor

Questions dealing with the situation in the text:

1. Who is the speaker? What is the point of view?

Taking the position that literature is the result of someone saying something to someone, and thus an act, rather than an artifact, you must first discover the identity and angle of vision of the speaker. You begin here in your efforts to step into the circle of meaning because the speaker's point of view and identity determine all the rest of the text's elements. Ask yourself "who is talking?" At times

you find the speaker to be as identifiable as the narrator Mark Twain is in "The Story of a Speech," while at other times you may find the speaker to be as indeterminable as in Gwendolyn Brooks' poem "Bronzeville Woman in a Red Hat." Or You may find no central speaker at all, but, instead, a series of characters who speak in turn as in most plays. The speaker may speak only for himself as in Wordsworth's "Daffodils"; he may speak both for himself and for characters as in Eudora Welty's "Why I Live at the P.O."; or characters alone may speak as in Genet's play "The Maids."

All the literature you read can be divided into one of three categories: (a) literature whose words are the utterance of a single speaker, as in most lyric poetry; (b) literature whose words are the utterance of a speaker who both talks directly to his audience and talks through the voices of his characters, as in most prose fiction; and (c) literature whose words are the utterance only of a series of characters with no central speaker, as in most plays.

Once you have discovered whether or not you have a principal speaker, and whether or not that speaker is identifiable as a particular kind of human being, you need to discover the text's point of view. Point of view is crucial to your understanding because the angle of vision determines how the reader is expected to see the situation.

In the majority of literary texts, you will be able to identify the point of view as being one of the following five types: omniscient, limited omniscient, objective observer, major participant, and minor participant. The glossary has a definition of each of these points of view along with a diagram that will help you see the relationships between the various types of point of view. Identifying point of view

in poetry or drama may be more difficult than in prose fiction but you can discover the point of view by asking yourself: Whose story does this seem to be? With whom do our sympathies tend to lie? Whose character is being explored most fully? The answers to these questions should help you find which character's point of view seems to predominate.

Once you have discovered the point of view from which the speaker makes his utterance, you need to know whether or not the implied author intends you to believe the truth of the speaker's words. The next piece in the puzzle concerns the reliability of the speaker.

2. To what extent is the speaker telling the truth? To what extent does the speaker reflect or embody the norms and values of the implied author?

The implied author's intent may not be in harmony with the created speaker in the work. Paradoxical as that may seem, you have only to read a work like Johnathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," where the speaker advocates eating Irish children to relieve famine and overcrowding in Ireland; or C. S. Lewis' Screwtape Letters, where advice is given devils on how to corrupt earthdwellers, to recognize that an author may intend the speaker to present a position opposite to the author's own position in order to reinforce the cumulative intent. The unreliable narrator's values must be embodied by the interpreter on a double track with those of the implied author so all can perceive the irony or contradiction of norms and values.

On the other hand are examples of the speaker and implied author sharing similar norms and values. Three such examples are found in the "I Have a Dream" speech by Martin Luther King; the "When I Have Fears"

poem by John Keats; and the "Horsie" short story by Dorothy Parker.

If you are still not sure whether the speaker and implied author share the same values, you may have to look more carefully into the life and beliefs of the author.

Now that you know the speaker's identity and values, you need to turn your attention to the activity and motivation of the speaker and/or characters in the text so that your behavior as an interpreter is consistent with the behavior of the speaker and/or characters.

3. Who performs the major action and with what motivation?

You now need to discover who is carrying out the principal incidents in the selection and why. Why does a character do what she/he does? What are the motivations? What are the reasons inherent in the organization for the character's actions? What is revealed about the speaker or character that makes the subsequent actions not only possible, but, in the Aristotelian sense, both probable and necessary. Examining the motivations and actions of characters other than the principal one, can help you see the way they influence or are influenced by the actions of the principal character.

Sometimes the principal speaker seems to be speaking to a specific audience, one that is different from a general audience. In Eudora Welty's "Why I Live at the P.O." for example, the postmistress, who is the principal speaker, seems to be talking to a customer who has stopped in. The nature of the audience to whom the speaker directs the utterance is another piece in the puzzle of meaning.

4. To whom is the speaker (or character, if a play) speaking within the horizon of the text?

The easiest way to approach the answer to the question of listener identity is to ask yourself whether the speaking situation is an open or a closed one. In other words, is the utterance directed to an identifiable listener or body of listeners (closed situation), or is the utterance directed to all who might listen (open situation)? Most conventional drama can be considered closed because the characters address each other rather than the general audience.[3] Poetry and prose vary widely in open-ness and closed-ness. Andrew Marvel's poem "To His Coy Mistress" is closed because the words "Come live with me and be me love" are obviously not addressed to just anyone who happened by, but to a person who can be identified through the words of the poem as a woman, beloved by the speaker, who has refused to consumate their love relationship. The situation may also be considered closed if the speaker seems to be talking to himself, allowing the audience to overhear as seems to be the case in "Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note by Imamu Amiri Bakara (LeRoi Jones), or e. e. cummings' "Chanson Innocente."

Open situations occur in Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," Robert Frost's "The Gift Outright," and Frank O'Connor's "First Confession" since these works are addressed anyone who might care to listen. If the situation is open, the interpreter can include members of the immediate audience with the audience within the text; if the situation is closed, the interpreter must ask the audience to overhear while the speaker talks to the text's specified listener.

The listeners, be they determinate or indeterminate, are often spoken to from a specific place. You need now to look at the factors of the text that can help you and your audience visualize the

setting in which the speaker is located.

5. What are the details of the setting?

The interpreter must discover what specifics of the physical setting, if any, exist in the text. The setting may be in the speaker's mind (remembered daffodils in Wordsworth's "Daffodils," or remembered poetic inspiration as in Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci"), or in a carefully created setting like the countryside of Tolkein's Middle Earth. Physical setting may, however, not have a significant place in the text if the ideas need no concrete setting. Denise Levertov's "The Secret" is a case in point. The speaker is interested in the secret of life that two girls are discovering. The setting for the discovery is not specified. If details <u>are</u> given see the room with all its furnishings, or the landscape down to the last blade of grass. If you will do that we, in your audience, can begin to grasp some of the fullness of the setting.

A question closely allied to that of setting, is the question of time as it functions in the text.

6. What is the time of day, season, and/or year? Is time handled realistically, or nonrealistically, or is time not an element in the life of the text?

What clues fill in the puzzle piece marked "time" in your interpretation of the text? To answer that question look at the function of clock time in the text. If, for example, noontime in the spring of 1926 is specified in the text, learn why that particular span is designated so that you can set that sense of time within the horizon of meaning for yourself and your listeners. You need to find out if the sequence of incidents occurs in roughly the same order as

they might occur outside the life of the pages of the literature. If events do not follow clock time, you need to find out whether that is because time is of no consequence to the action of the text, and therefore not specified by the implied author; or whether events are presented in an order other than implied by the movement of a clock. Nonrealistic handling of time, for example, occurs in James Dickey's poem "The Bee," where the realistic time element of a father trying to arrest his little boy's flight toward a busy highway is suddenly interrupted by the speaker's memory of his football training in college.

All the elements of speaker, action, listener, setting, and time you have looked at so far in your analysis are integrated by the implied author to illuminate some topic, theme, or thesis. The next question focuses attention on the identity of your text's particular subject.

7. In five or fewer words, what is the subject of the text?

In answering this question you are limited to no more than five words so that you do not confuse subject with structure, or with total comprehension. You must be succinct in stating the main subject because the process of distilling the subject into a few words will focus your attention on its essence. You may find the subject to be love, as in Gregory Corso's "Marriage;" death, as in Emily Dickinson's "Because I Could Not Stop for Death;" nature as in Wendell Berry's "The Peace of Wild Things," society, as in Countee Cullen's "Incident;" God, as in Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Pied Beauty;" change, as in Walt Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry;" or art as in John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

When you have discovered the subject you can use your

information to locate the attitudes the speaker and implied author have toward the topic.

8. What is the implied author's set of attitudes toward this subject? What is the speaker's set of attitudes toward this subject?

You must now refer back to your answer to question # 2 regarding the truthfulness of the speaker to the implied author's values. You must determine whether or not the speaker and implied author share or differ in their attitudes toward the subject. If the speaker shares values and norms with the implied author, it will follow that their attitudes toward the subject will be similar; but if the speaker is untruthful, then their attitudes will differ greatly. In Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," referred to in the discussion of question # 2, the speaker, whose beliefs and values are not shared by the implied author, has attitudes of self-importance (including his being confident, arrogant, contemptuous, and bombastic) as he suggests the roasting of two year olds as the means for eradicating over-population and hunger in Ireland. The implied author's attitudes, on the other hand, are those of passion (including his being enraged, angry, and indignant) to English solutions for Ireland's problems.

The interpreter must be able to embody both sets of attitudes simultaneously. If you have trouble identifying attitude, ask yourself how <u>you</u> would feel in a similar situation. More information on attitude is contained in the glossary.

If you have correctly identified subject and attitude in the two previous questions, the next question will be easy because it asks you to identify key lines pointing to subject and attitude in the text. Question # 9 is the first of seven questions about the construction

of the literature.

Questions dealing with the structure of the text:

9. What specific lines in the text point to subject and attitude?

State at least four to five key lines that touch on the significance of subject and attitude in your selection. You may wish subtly to stress these lines in embodying the literature so that your audience will also recognize their import. In Irwin Shaw's "The Girls in Their Summer Dresses," the key lines "'Some day,' she said, crying, 'you're going to make a move. . .'" said by the wife Frances; and her husband Michael's reply "'Yes,' Michael said after a while, 'I know.'" are key lines that reveal the deteriorating relationship and growing tension between the pair.

Often the author will reveal subject and attitude through the choice of a title. How the title might reveal these elements is part of your answer to the next question.

10. How does the title provide a clue to the subject and/or attitudes?

Normally, your first acquaintance with the text is through its title. The choice of a title is often revelatory of the subject, the listener's attitude or the speaker's attitude. If, for example, you were given the choice of spending the evening with one of two unknown people, one named Richard Cory and the other Miniver Cheevy, which would you choose? Why? Do the names suggest anything to you? Each name is the title of a poem by Edwin Arlington Robinson. Richard Cory is young, wealthy and physically attractive; Miniver Cheevy is a sensitive old drunkard.

If the selection has no title, as is sometimes the case with poetry, ask yourself why the work might have no title; use the first line as a title, as in the Emily Dickinson poem analyzed at the end of the twenty questions, and explore the implications of the first line for the rest of the text.

Now that you have put half of the puzzle pieces together through your explorations of speaker, action, listener, setting, time, and attitude, you will be able to see how these elements are ordered into a comprehensible sequence of events or ideas.

11. What organization of ideas or events is used by the implied author to order the subject?

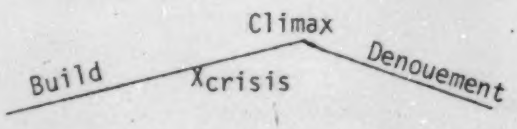
You may see the answer to this question as an outline of either the lines of action or the lines of ideas presented as they occur in the text. If you are ambitious and alert, you may be able to explore the strategies by which the implied author takes his readers from Point A, where the text begins, to Point Z, where he wishes them to be in terms of feeling, understanding, or action by the end of the text. "Critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose," argues Kenneth Burke. "They are not merely answers, they are strategic answers, stylized answers" (italics his). You will find the strategic answers lie, in part, in the way in which the ideas and events are structured from the first to the last line in the text.

If you follow the organization carefully through the text, you will already have noted the elements that combine to form the crisis, climax, and denouement. The next question asks you to develop more fully your understanding of these three elements of the strategic answer.

12. What elements constitute the crisis, the climax, and the denouement in the organization of the literature?

The crisis can be most easily explained as that event occuring in the organization after which every other event, including the climax and the denouement, must logically follow. Crisis consists of a new element, or a change in the situation. In Jean Genet;s The Maid, for example, the crisis comes when the audience learns that the maids have written letters to the police accusing their Mistress's lover of thievery. The climax, and denouement follow upon the introduction of this new element. A work of literary art will usually reveal an event or idea that causes the rest of the poem to fall into its strategic organization.

The crisis makes probable and necessary the climax that will surely follow. The climax is that point in the text where the energy of the text, and concurrently, the energy of the interpreter, is at its peak. The climax often, but by no means must, occurs at a point about three-fourths of the way through the text. A diagram of a text's organization might look like this:



The denouement, or falling off of emotional intensity, follows the climax. The denouement may be as short as the final line of "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson. "And then they were upon her." It may last for several paragraphs as in James Joyce's "The Boarding House," or it may have to be part of the silence that follows the last words of the text as in the ending of Saki's "The Open Window." Wherever the denouement occurs, the interpreter must recognize that the climactic

tension of the literature is falling off, and must, therefore, relax the body and bring the tension level down, thus structuring the interpretation performance along the same lines of build, climax, and denouement as in the text.

Up to this point the questions have concerned the situation and the structure of the text. The next six questions will ask you to explore the dimension of language usage in the text. The first of these language questions asks you to discover the general type of language used in the literature you are studying.

Questions dealing with language in the text:

13. What is the general level of language usuage in the work? Is it colloquial, informal, elevated, or a combination?

As a rule of thumb, you might say that "colloquial" is the level of language you use with your closest friends, and your family, and your pets. It is characterized by slang, short often unfinished sentences, and an oral quality that makes it seem like the most casual of utterances. Bound East for Cardiff, by Eugene O'Neil contains an example of colloquial language:

> This sailor life ain't much to cry about leavin' - just one ship after another, hard work, small pay, and bum grub; and when we git into port, just a drunk endin' up in a fight, and all your money gone, and then the ship away again. Never meetin' no nice people.

Informal language is the language you tend to use in the classroom, or talking with people you know fairly well. Complete sentences, ordinary words characterize informal language. Hemingway's "A Clean Well-Lighted Place"

has such an example.

> A girl and a soldier went by in the street. The street light shone on the brass number on his collar. The girl wore no head covering and hurried beside him.

Elevated language is characterized by compound and complex sentences, polysyllabic words, and a formal tone. Like most nineteenth century writers, Dickins often uses this level of language with his narrator:

> In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered -- flushed, but smiling proudly, with the pudding, like a speckled cannonball, so hard and firm, blazing in half a quartern of ignited brandy, and topped with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

Literature may, and often does, contain one or more of these levels of language. The narrator may speak in an informal manner and then introduce one character who speaks in a formal manner, and another who speaks in a colloquial manner. The work of Charles Dickins contains good examples of free movement from one level of language usage to another.

Note how the language level in the trial scene from The Pickwick Papers moves from formal (narrator), to informal (Serjeant Buzfuz), to colloquial (Sam Weller):

> Sam bowed his acknowledgements and turned, with unimpaired cheerfulness of countenance, towards Serjeant Buzfuz.
>
> "Now, Mr. Weller," said Serjeant Buzfuz.
>
> "Now, sir," replied Sam.

"I believe you are in the service of Mr. Pickwick. the defendant in this case. Speak up, if you please, Mr. Weller."

"I mean to speak up, sir," replied Sam; "I am in the service o' that 'ere gen'lm'n, and a wery good service it is."

"Little to do and plenty to get, I suppose?" said Serjeant Buzfuz with jocularity.

As an interpreter trying to embody the language, you will change voice and body to fit the language of each speaker in your selection -- being most casual with the colloquial, relaxed but not quite so casual with the informal, and more ceremonious with the elevated language.

The level of language is created by individual words being combined in the text. The next piece in the puzzle concerns any of those individual words whose meanings in their special context may be unclear to you.

*14. What is the definition, in your own words, of each word in the selection with which you are unfamiliar?[5]

The context in which a word is used determines its meaning. Even if you think you know what a word means, it is helpful to look it up in a dictionary to be sure you have the nuance correctly identified. Rather than copy a definition from the dictionary, write down, in your own words, your understanding of the word in the context in which it is used.

Continuing your look at individual words, you next address yourself to the allusion.

*15. How does each allusion add to your comprehension of the text?

Allusions are references to mythology, history, or other literary works. Allusions help the implied author widen the connotations of the words. If you read the line, "he is always tilting at windmills," the implied author wants you to think what the character might have in common with Don Quixote. "You may flunk but Pippa Passes" is a Max Shulman play on words that is funny only if you recognize the line from Browning.

Your familiarity with history, mythology, and literature determines how many of the allusions you will recognize. To be sure to catch as many allusions as exist in your text, look up any word or phrase that seems odd or unfamiliar to you. It may be an allusion that will suddenly make sense out of a series of events.

Like the allusion, the figure of speech can say, in condensed form, what might otherwise need paragraphs or stanzas to express.

*16. How does each figure of speech (for example, metaphor, simile, personification, synecdoche, or hyperbole) add to your comprehension of the literature?

In general, figures of speech are the result of the discovery of similarities in otherwise dissimilar things. If you read a sentence and it could not be literally true, you have probably identified a figure of speech. "You are beautiful and faded like an old opera tune" (Amy Lowell); "The snow is a white blanket" (Ogden Nash); "Pots and pans bickering in the kitchen" (Rod McKuen); "Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears" (Shakespeare), are all figures of speech of one sort or another. None of these statements could be literally true, yet by their juxtaposition of dissimilar things, we can see the similarities that help explain the

ideas. Figures of speech take your experience with an opera tune, and compare it to an old person; pots and pans help you see how banging in the kitchen could reflect anger. Figures of speech use an experience you have already had, and apply it to the experience in the literature to make the idea more concrete for you.

Another way that the implied author connects your experience in the literature is to involve your senses by making use of the language of sensory impressions.

*17. How do the sensory impressions (for example, auditory, visual, tactile, kinetic, kinesthetic, thermal, gustatory, olfactory, organic) add to your comprehension of the literature?

Whereas a figure of speech is not literally true, the words creating sensory impressions mean just what they say. Consider the sensory impressions from William Carlos Williams' poem "Spring and All." These words are used in their literal sense to create in your brain visual pictures, thermal perceptions, and kinetic movement: "blue mottled clouds;" cold wind;" the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf." If you can enter into the world Williams creates with all your senses awake, you will be able to share this total sensory comprehension with your audience so that they can also experience.

The sounds of the owrds, as well as their meanings, can often induce particular feelings, and ideas for the listener. Your next question asks you to examine sounds as they relate to meaning in the text.

*18. What sound values do you find in your selection?

a. List prominent examples of assonance, alliteration, and consonance, and underline the related sounds.

b. For a poem, identify rhyme scheme, foot, and meter (if applicable).

Writers are people in love with words, and the power of those words over other people. Your analysis of literature from the sound perspective can show you the artistry of a sound-loving writer. Nearly everyone who loves literature can agree that the sound values need the embodiment of the human voice to gain their fullest life. W. B. Yeats always "chanted his verse aloud as he wrote, seeking always the right word, which would convey his meaning and yet fit into the sound effect which he desired to create."[6] Once you have discovered examples of assonance, alliteration, and consonance, ask yourself why these particular sounds might have been stressed. What effect does alliteration have in this comic strip line: "Ah, spring! That fair-haired, flower-flecked filibuster of flirtatious fluff!"? What effect does assonance have in this line from Gray's "Elegy": "The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea."? Why this particular pattern? Why might the poet repeat a rhyme in a particular line? Might that rhyme refer you to another line for comparison or contrast? Why might a line of poetry move in iambic foot rather than trochaic foot? Compare these two passages for the variations mentioned above:

Tiger, Tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

(William Blake)

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell.

(William Shakespeare)

To the extent that you can, try to assess what effect each of the sound values has on the total meaning of the selection.

Thus far in your completion of the puzzle of meaning, you have put into place the sections dealing with situation, structure, and language. You are now ready to put in the final pieces that help summarize meaning.

Questions dealing with summation of the text:

19. What can you discover about the writer's life and/or general outlook that is clearly relevant to the work you are analyzing?

To answer this question you will have to engage in a biographical study. The danger inherent in such a study is that you may catch on to some incident or fact of existence in the writer's life that will lead you to make incorrect assumptions about the source of a text's idea or emotion. The fact that Amy Lowell smoked black cigars is not particularly relevant to your study of her poem, "Lilacs." The danger is not making a biographical study is that you may lose sight of the maker of the work whose life may be an important clue to the puzzle's cohesiveness. When you are answering this question, spend some time in the library looking up articles and books by and about the writer whose work you are interpreting. As you read these auxiliary sources, look for items that help explain the work you are studying. Look for the issues that matter

to the writer, for the events in the writer's personal, social, or economic life that may have shaped the subject, the attitude, the level of language, or any of the other topics touched on by the previous eighteen questions you have answered. Dylan Thomas' heritage of the Welsh language, Emily Dickinson's self-imposed confinement in her New England home, William Carlos Williams' profession as a physician have marked effect on the situations, structure, language, and purpose of their works.

The last, and most essential task in your analysis is for you to arrive at a defensible position regarding the speech act -- the something that the someone is trying to say to the someone else.

20. What, in essence, is the implied author saying about the human condition?

Recognizing the truth of the New Critics' dictum that nothing except "these words in this order" can explain the text, it is still useful to try to work out for yourself, in your own words, the implied author's artistic intent. Impossible as it is to paraphrase, talking about the text can help you appreciate the skill with which the implied author has been able to convey impressions and ideas. Try to see how the subject has been developed to its point of artistry. Discover what statement the writer has wished to make that prompted the strategic choices of organization, sound values, point of view, and other major elements in the text. Search for the levels of meaning implied by the text. On one level Dylan Thomas' "Fern Hill" recollects a childhood; on another it explores the process of growing up; on a third it reveals the irony of life; and on a fourth, it searches for a place in the universe of nature. Each work of literary art is a unique contribution to our comprehension of the conflicts, sorrow, loves, pains, and joys

of being human.

Summary For Teachers And Students

The questions posed in these pages stand in the middle of a continuum between the general "who, what, where, when, and why" approach to literary analysis at one end; and the individualized questions tailored to a specific text at the other. The questions are general enough to be useful for almost any piece of literature and yet specific enough to come to grips with the unique dimensions of each individual literary text. By interpreting the words of the text aloud after answering each of the twenty questions, students will discover what they are learning about the words as they exist on the page. As the same time, they will discover what they are learning about the embodiment of the words in performance. By totally involving their bodies and minds in the words of selection every time a question is answered, they come closer to stepping into the experience of the literature. Palmer explains that "only when he can step into the magic circle of its horizon can the interpreter understand its meaning. This is that mysterious 'hermeneutical circle' without which the meaning of the text cannot emerge."[7]

If this program of written answers coupled with oral embodiment of the text's words is conscientiously followed, interpretation students will be able to fit the pieces of the puzzle more surely into the magic circle.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Richard E. Palmer, Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory In Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 16.

[2]Palmer, p. 25.

[3]Exceptions to this common practice in drama are frequent, however, as for example, Tom in Tennessee William's Glass Menagerie, the narrator in Brian Friel's play Winners and Losers, or the Stage Manager in Thornton Wilder's Our Town. At points in the plays, these speakers turn and address the audience directly thereby, for the moment, turning a closed situation, where characters talk to each other, into an open situation, where the speaker talks to the spectators.

[4]Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Stage University Press, 1957), p. 3.

[5]The starred questions (numbers 14 through 18) are to be answered from the text as it is cut to read in class, and not from the work as a whole. Much as we all dislike cutting any work of literature, the time demands on a class usually mean that only portions of longer works can be read out loud. To expect a student to identify all new vocabulary, allusions, figures of speech, sensory impressions and sound values in a long work would be an unreasonable request.

[6]Norman Jeffares, "W. B. Yeats and His Methods of Writing Verse," The Permanence of Yeats, eds. James Hall and Martin Steinman (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1961), p. 271. I am grateful to Don Geiger for the source of this quotation.

[7]Palmer, p. 25.

GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS

ACTION — The progression of events in the text, whether that progression takes place inside the speaker's mind, or is external to the speaker, is the action. Action may be mental or physical.

ALLITERATION — The repetition of initial consonant or vowel sounds is termed alliteration. Coleridge's

"In Zanadu did Kubla Kahn
A stately pleasure dome decree"

has alliteration of "K" and "D" in its lines. Cavafy's lines from "Waiting for the Barbarians," contain similar "e" sounds at the beginning of the words "embroidered" and "emeralds."

"Today with their red togas on, with their
embroidered togas?
And all those rings on their fingers with
splendid flashing emeralds?"

Don't be fooled by words whose letters may be the same but whose sounds are different. In the phrase "Alice ate the artichoke," three of the words begin with the letter "a" but the sounds of each of the three are quite different, and therefore, the sentence is not alliterative.

ALLUSION — A reference to mythical, historical or literary persons or places or events. Lawrence Ferlinghetti likes to use frequent allusions in his poetry. In "Autobiography," for example the lines "I have travelled among unknown men.
I have been in Asia
with Noah in the Ark.

I have heard the sound of revelry
by night
I have wandered lonely
as a crowd."

contains allusions to Genesis and Wordsworth's "Daffodils."

ASSONANCE

The repetition of the same vowel sounds with different consonant sounds in two or more words placed close together is assonance. Generally, assonance is a term applied to similar vowel sounds occurring anywhere in the word except at the beginning where it is called ALLITERATION.

"the lonely moated grange," "the rim of the ridge" are examples of assonance.

ATTITUDE

The emotion or feeling that character and implied author have toward the subject and/or action of the text is the attitude. The following vocabulary of attitudes may prove helpful.

Parrish, W. Maxfield, "A Vocabulary of Attitudes," Reading Aloud, 3rd ed. New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1953, pp. 70-72, but dropped from the fourth edition.

Attitudes chiefly rational: instructive, admonitory, indignant, puzzled, curious, pensive, preoccupied, studied, candid, thoughtless, innocent, frank, sincere, questioning, persuading, pleading, argumentative.

Attitudes of pleasure: peaceful, contented, cheerful, sprightly, joyful, playful, jubilant, elated, enraptured.

Attitudes of pain: uneasy, troubled, regretful, annoyed, bored, disgusted, miserable, irritable, sullen, bitter, crushed, pathetic, tragic.

Attitudes of passion: nervous, hysterical, impulsive, reckless, desperate, frantic, wild, fierce, furious, savage, enraged, angry, greedy, jealous, insane.

Attitudes of self-control: calm, solemn, serious, serene, simple, gentle, imperturbable, nonchalant, wary, cautious.

Attitudes of friendliness: gracious, sympathetic, compassionate, forgiving, pitying, indulgent, soothing, tender, loving, solicitous, approving, helpful, obliging, confiding, trusting.

Attitudes of unfriendliness: sharp, severe, butting, spiteful, harsh, boorish, pitiless, derisive, satiric, sarcastic, insolent, belittling, contemptuous, accusing, scolding, suspicious.

Attitudes of comedy: facetious, comic, ironic, satiric, amused, mocking, playful, humorous, hilarious, uproarious.

Attitudes of animation: eager, excited, earnest, energetic, vigorous, hearty, ardent, passionate, rapturous, ecstatic, feverish, inspired, exalted, breathless, hasty, brisk, hopeful.

Attitudes of apathy: sluggish, languid, dispassionate, dull, indifferent, stoical, resigned, defeated, hopeless, dry, monotonous, feeble, dreaming, bored, blasé.

Attitudes of self-importance: impressive, profound, proud, dignified, lofty, confident, peremptory, bombastic, arrogant, pompous, stiff, boastful, exultant, domineering, flippant, resolute, haughty, condescending, bold, defiant, comtemptuous.

Attitudes of submission and timidity: shy, humble, docile, ashamed, modest, timid, unpretentious, respectful, apologetic, devout, servile, obsequious, contrite, obedient, willing, fawning, frightened, surprised, horrified, aghast, astonished, trembling, wondering, awed, shocked, uncomprehending.

AUDITORY SENSORY IMPRESSION — The sense of hearing is called into play as in this quotation from Frost's "Acquainted with the Night,": "I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet/ When far away an interrupted cry/ Came over houses. . . ."

CHARACTER — A person participating in the action of the text.

CLIMAX — The tension of the text is greatest at this point in the action. The climax frequently occurs near, but not at the end of the text. The ACTION of the text has been building to this point and DENOUEMENT follows. Emotional intensity usually marks the climax.

CLOSED SPEAKING SITUATION — When the speaker is speaking to a listener who can be identified implicity or explicitly by the words of the text, the situtation is closed. The words of the text are directed to a specific listener or listeners. See OPEN SPEAKING SITUATION.

CONSONANCE

The repetition of the same consonant sound with different vowel sounds is consonance. Note how the consonant sounds agree, while the vowels differ in the line-end words Wilfred Owen's "Strange Meeting."

And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall
And by his dead smile I know I stood in hell

***

Courage was mine, and I had mystery
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery.

***

I am the enemy you killed my friend
I knew you in this death; for so you frowned.

CRISIS

The crisis occurs at some point in the action of the text before the climax. It is that element is introduced into the text that causes the climax to be inevitable.

DENOUEMENT

After the CRISIS has caused the CLIMAX the level of tension drops considerably. In the old westerns, it is that final scene where the cowboy and his girl are seen walking off into the sunset. In most television dramas it is that moment where the dectective and his/her co-workers gather in the office to share a joke.

ELEVATED LANGUAGE

Language that is characterized by long, involved sentences, often with many qualifying phrases and polysyllabic words is considered elevated. Most of the pre-twentieth century writers used an elevated style. The style is more formal in tone than is INFORMAL or COLLOQUIAL language.

FIGURE OF SPEECH

A device or arrangement "of language by which a writer seeks, in escaping from the direct and literal use of language, to speak more strikingly, more picturesquely, or more accurately," is the lucid definition by Wallace A. Bacon in The Art of Interpretation, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 476.

See more under specific figures of speech as HYPERBOLE, METAPHOR, PERSONIFICATION, SIMILE, and SYNECDOCHE.

FOOT

A specific placement of stressed syllables as a unit of METER is called a foot. The most common types of feet in poetry are:

1. iambic (syllables alternate unstressed/stressed unstressed/stressed as in "To be or not to be")
2. trochee (syllables alternate stressed/unstressed stressed/unstressed as in "Tiger, tiger burning bright")
3. anapest (syllables alternate unstressed/unstressed stressed unstressed/unstressed/stressed as in "like a child from the womb")
4. dactyl (syllables alternate stressed/unstressed/ unstressed as in the word mannikin.

GUSTATORY SENSORY IMPRESSION

The sense of taste is called into play as in John Fox's The Little Shepherd of Kindgom Come. "A great turkey supplanted the venison and last to come . . . was a Kentucky ham. That ham! Mellow, aged, boiled in champagne, baked brown, spiced deeply, rosy pink within, and of a flavor and fragrance to shatter the fast of a Pope. . . ."

HYPERBOLE

A gross exaggeration of the truth is called a hyperbole. Americans use hyperbolic phrases like "I nearly died laughing," "I could eat a bear," "I've got a billion things to do," frequently. From Shakespeare's Macbeth we find the sentence "All the perfumes in Araby would not sweeten this little hand," and in Rostand's Cyrano, Cyrano says of his nose, "When it bleeds, the red sea."

IMPLIED AUTHOR

The term "implied author" refers to that manifestation of an author that is contained in the words he writes. It is a useful term to use because it makes note of the separation of the author as a person and the author as the writer of the particular piece of literary art you are studying. Gwendolyn Brooks plays many roles in life (teacher, lecturer, wife, mother) but the role of implied author is the one that you meet when you pick up her poetry.

INFORMAL LANGUAGE — Informal language is characterized by short sentences, using a vocabulary of ordinary, though not usually slang words. (Adjectives are present but not in great numbers.) The language of most twentieth century writers tneds to be more informal and COLLOQUIAL than ELEVATED.

KINESTHETIC SENSORY IMPRESSION — The sense of muscular effort is called into play as in this quotation from Donne's "The Bait." "Let coarse bold hands, from slimy nest/ The bedded fish in banks outwrest. . . ."

KINETIC SENSORY IMPRESSION — The sense of motion involving little or no muscle participation is called into play as in Karl Shapiro's "Auto Wreck" The ambulance at top speed floating down/ . . . Wings in a heavy curve, dips down,/ And brakes speed, entering the crowd."

LIMITED OMNISCIENT — see POINT OF VIEW

MAJOR PARTICIPANT — see POINT OF VIEW

METAPHOR — A metaphor is a comparison of two or more dissimilar things. One thing is likened to another and spoken of as if it were that thing. "My vigor is a new-minted penny" (Amy Lowell), and "The snow is a white blanket" (Ogden Nash), are two metaphors from literature. We use metaphor in such everyday expressions as "save for a rainy day," or "you're skating on thin ice."

METER — The pattern of stressed syllables in a line of poetry is called meter. FOOT is a unit of meter. The number of beats to a line of poetry determines the meter. The most frequent meters in poetry are

1. trimeter (three beats to a line as in "Hello, I see my dear")
2. tetrameter (four beats to a line as in "Hello, I see my dear is here")
3. pentameter (five beats to a line as in "Hello, I see my dear is here today")

MINOR PARTICIPANT — see POINT OF VIEW

OBJECTIVE OBSERVER — see POINT OF VIEW

OLFACTORY SENSORY IMPRESSION — The sense of smell is called into play as in Thomas Wolfe's "The Golden World,"

> "He knew the good male smell of his father's sitting-room; of the smooth worn leather sofa, with the gaping horse-hair rent. . . of the flat moist plug of apple tobacco, stuck with a red flag; of wood-smoke and burnt leaves in October. . . ."

OMNISCIENT — see POINT OF VIEW

OPEN SPEAKING SITUATION — When the speaker is speaking to anyone who happens to pick up the text to read or to listen to its words, the situation is open. The words of the text are directed to a general audience. See CLOSED SPEAKING SITUATION.

ORGANIC SENSORY IMPRESSION — The sense of the stimulation of inner [illegible]s is called to play as in Dylan Thomas' Force That Through the Green Fuse Driv[illegible]e Flower, Flower,": "The force that drives the w[illegible]er through the rocks/ Drives my red blood. . . ."

PERSONIFICATION — When a writer gives human characteristics to abstractions or to non-living objects, the writer is using personification. Keats visualized autumn as "sitting careless on a granary floor." Other examples are "Faith kneels," "The mountains brood," or Rod McKuen's "Pots and pans bickering in the kitchen."

POINT OF VIEW — The principal perspective from which the action of the text is conveyed. The five most commonly used points of view are OMNISCIENT, LIMITED OMNISCIENT, OBJECTIVE OBSERVER, MAJOR PARTICIPANT, MINOR PARTICIPANT.

The omniscient speaker can see into nearly every character's mind. The limited omniscient speaker can see into only one character's mind. The objective observer reports what she/he sees but takes not part in the action and cannot read the minds of any of the characters.

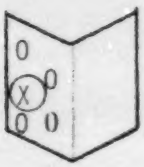
The major participant tells the action in "I" form and the major action takes place around him/her. The minor participant also tells the action in the "I" form but the major action takes place around another character. The following diagram might help explain the differences and similarities between the various points of view.

X = point of view speaker

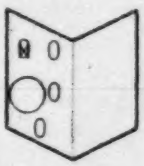
= text

0 = characters

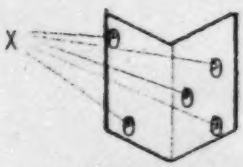
Major participant -- speaker is in the story, and is the principal character around which the action takes place--Anne Frank to the Diary of Anne Frank.



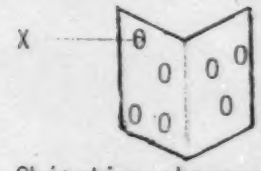
Minor participant -- speaker is in the story but is not the principal character around which the action takes place--Ishmael in Moby Dick.



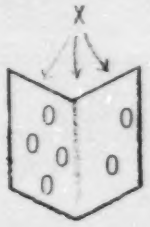
Omniscient -- speaker is outside the story and can tell what most of the characters are thinking--James Joyce's The Boarding House.



Limited omniscient - speaker is outside the story and can tell what one character (sometimes two) is thinking. Frank O'Connor "First Confession."



Objective observer - speaker is outside the story and cannot tell what anyone is thining though he may know the past histories of the characters. The speaker in Jackson's "The Lottery."



Myriad points of view can be discovered in literature and some authors have the ability and desire to create a work of literary art with changeable points of view as, for example, Robbe-Grillet did in Jealousy or John Fowles in The Magus. For further discussion of point of view you may want to read the classic The Rhetoric of Fiction by Wayne Booth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). For an investigation of point of view in Robbe-Grillet, consult Lilla A. Heston's "An Exploration of the Narrator in Robbe-Grillet's Jealousy," Central States Speech Journal 24 (Fall 1973), 178-182.

RHYME SCHEME

The pattern of end rhyme in poetry is rhyme scheme. It is described by assigning the letter "a" to the word at the end of the first line and to every word thereafter that rhymes with the first end word. The letter "b" is given to the first end word that does not rhyme with "a;" the letter "c" to the first end-rhyme that does not rhyme with either "a" or "b." Thus the pattern of end rhyme in

Emily Dickinson's "I Never Saw a Moor" is ABCB since only the second and fourth lines rhyme.

I never saw a moor
I never saw the sea
Yet know I how the heather looks
And what a wave must be

SENSORY IMPRESSIONS — The use of language in which the sensations of sight, taste, touch, smell, etc. are employed. Se more under specific sensory impressions as AUDITORY, GUSTATORY, KINESTHETIC, KINETIC, OLFACTORY, ORGANIC, TACTILE, THERMAL, AND VISUAL.

SIMILE — Like a METAPHOR, a simile is a comparison of two or more dissimilar things but the simile adds the words "like" or "as" to the comparison. "lovely as a poplar" and "you are beautiful and faded like an old opera tune" (Amy Lowell) are two examples.

SPEAKER — The one who does the talking in a piece of literature. The SPEAKER may be identified as having specific characteristics or may be only a voice created by the author through which the author speaks. The speaker may be a narrator, in which case he tells a story, or a lyric voice in which case he expresses only personal feelings. A piece of literature usually has a principal speaker. If others speak, they can be classified as CHARACTER.

SUBJECT — The major topic of the text is the subject. The subject can usually be stated in a few words. Subject

is not to be confused with the overall significance or meaning of the text but is confined to meaning major theme.

SYNECDOCHE — When a dominant part of something is spoken of as if it were the whole, the figure of speech is called synecdoche. The most important part of sailors are their hands and so the call "All hands on deck," using the dominant part of the whole sailor is appropriate. Infantry personnel are called "foot soldiers" because walking is a dominant part of their activity. "taking the wheel," the "horsy set" and the "jet set" are common uses of synecdoche.

TACTILE SENSORY IMPRESSION — The sense of touch is called into play as in John Steinbeck's "Flight."

> "His eyes searched the ground. He picked up a sharp blade of stone and scraped at the wound, sawed at the proud flesh and then squeezed the green juice out in big drops."

THERMAL SENSORY IMPRESSION — The sense of temperature, either hot or cold is called into play here as in H(ilda) D(oolittle) "Garden." "Fruit cannot drop/ through this thick air --/ fruit cannot fall into heat/ that presses up and blunts/ the points of pears/ and rounds the grapes."

VISUAL SENSORY IMPRESSIONS

The sense of sight is called into play as in this quotation from Milton's "Lycidas": "The tufted Crow-tow, and pale Jessamine,/ the white Pink, and the Pansy freakt with jet. . . ."

SAMPLE ANALYSIS

Text: Emily Dickinson's "'Nature' is What We See"[1]

"Nature" is what we see--
The Hill--the Afternoon--
Squirrel--Eclipse--the Bumble bee--
Nay--Nature is Heaven--
Nature is what we hear--
The Bobolink--the Sea--
Thunder--the Cricket--
Nay--Nature is Harmony--
Nature is what we know--
Yet have no art to say--
So impotent Our Wisdom is
To her Simplicity.

---

[1]Emily Dickinson, The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, Thomas H. Johnson, ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), No. 688, p. 332.

Questions Dealing with the Situation in the Text

1. Who is the speaker? What is the point of view?

The speaker is closely identified with the poet. The speaker has no definable characteristics as a specific person and is, therefore, indeterminate. The text's words are the utterance of a single speaker, yet the listener is almost a co-participant. The "we" puts the speaker and listener directly into the poem. Since no other characters are introduced, however, the point of view can be stated as major participant.

2. To what extent is the speaker telling the truth? To what extent does the speaker reflect or embody the norms and values of the implied author?

Emily Dickinson believed in the Transcendental theory of the essential unity of man, nature, and God. She believed that nature possessed the same divine spark as man thus her own values are consistent with the speaker's values in this poem. The speaker is therefore truthful.

3. Who performs the major action and with what motivation?

Since this poem is concerned with the emotions of a single speaker, and as such is classifiable as a lyric poem, the action is performed solely by the speaker. The speaker is motivated by the need or desire to understand natural power and acts upon that need by attempting a definition of nature.

4. To whom is the speaker speaking within the horizon of the text?

The speaker, using the subject "we" brings the listener right into the situation with him/her: "We see," "we hear," "we know," yet "Our Wisdom" is impotent to nature's simplicity. The term "we" is used in intimacy as if the speaker and listener share the same ideas and thoughts. Yet, since the listener is unspecified, the situation is an open one -- the listener can be anyone who happens to pick up the poem to read or listen to its words. The interpreter's immediate audience can be closely identified with the speaker's audience.

5. What are the details of the setting?

Because a biographical study of Emily Dickinson tells us that she rarely left her New England home, we can surmize that the setting is her back yard in near-rural Amherst, Massachusetts. From her back yard she could easily see or hear a hill, a squirrel, a bumble bee, a cricket, a bobolink, or thunder. One can picture a field and hill in the distance with all of the sounds, smells and sights of her surroundings.

6. What is the time of day, season, and/or year? Is time handled realistically or nonrealistically, or is time not an element in the text?

The time seems to be summer because of the sources of sounds and sights in the poem even though the speaker does not tell the reader this specifically. The appearance and sounds of bumble bee, the bobolink, thunder, and the cricket are familiar summertime occurrences. Clock time

is not an important element in the progression of the poem. The time is eternal summer for the speaker's purposes.

7. In five or fewer words, what is the subject of the text?

The subject of "'Nature' is What We See" is an attempt to define nature.

8. What is the implied author's set of attitudes toward this subject? What is the speaker's set of attitudes toward this subject?

The speaker and the implied author share the attitudes of reverence toward nature coupled with a sense of humility toward the speaker's own ability to formulate so awesome a definition.

Questions dealing with the structure of the text

9. What specific lines in the text point to subject and attitude?

Three lines at equal intervals throughout the poem point to the subject of the definition of nature: "'Nature', is what we See," "Nature is what we hear," and "Nature is what we know." Attitudes of reverence and humility are carried especially through the lines, "Nature is Heaven," "Nature is Harmony," and "So impotent Our Wisdom is to her Simplicity."

10. How does the title provide a clue to the subject and/or attitudes?

Since Emily Dickinson rarely titled her poems, the first line will have to suffice for a title. "'Nature is what we see" alerts the reader to the subject of nature that is to be explored in the text and is, in one line, itself a definition. That it is an inconclusive definition

the reader must find out by reading the rest of the poem. Attitude is not a dominant part of the title, but the adumbration of subject certainly is.

11. What organization of ideas or events is used by the implied author to order the subject?

This poem has a clearly defined and rhythmical arrangement of parts. The poem is set up in one stanze of twelve lines, but the thought can be divided into three sections: Nature is what we see, nature is what we hear, and nature is what we know. In the first four lines, the visual aspect of nature is explored, and the conclusion is reached that what is seen is really "Heaven." The second four lines assess the auditory aspect of nature, and conclude with the thought that nature expresses all "Harmony." The last four lines reveal the inadequacy of language since some things can only be known with words: "Nature is what we know/Yet have no art to say--".

12. What elements constitute the crisis, the climax, and the denouement in the organization of the literature?

The crisis, or turning point, is in the fourth line when the speaker first denies the correctness of the first definition. Definition, denial, and subsequent attempts to re-define characterize the rest of the poem. The climax occurs with realization that definition is impossible for us because "Nature is what we know--/ Yet have no art to say." The high point of tension is reached here because the speaker now knows she/he must fail at the task of definition. The denouement follows in the last two lines, acknowledging that all of man's wisdom cannot fathom nature's simplicity: "So impotent Our Wisdom is/to her Simplicity."

Questions dealing with language

13. What is the general level of language usage in the work?

With the single exception of the word "Nay" that has an elevated ton to it, the level of language usage is everyday, informal and conversational. The speaker seems to be talking directly, and casually, but not colloquially, to us.

14. What is the definition, in your own words, of each word in the selection with which you are unfamiliar?

Impotent is the only word with which I was unfamiliar. In this context, "impotent" means lacking in ability and power; helpless.

15. How does each allusion add to your comprehension of the text?

No obvious example of allusion exists in this poem.

16. How does each figure of speech add to your comprehension of the literature?

In a series of metaphors, the speaker describes nature first as "what we see." Finding the sensation of sight insufficient for full description, she/he amends that ot say "Nature is Heaven." Continuing the search for a definition, the speaker describes nature as "What we hear," further corrected to mean a more extensive "Harmony." In a last try for a definition, the speaker asserts that nature is "what we know/ Yet have no art to say." She/he has come to a realization that nature cannot be defined even in metaphorical terms, but must be perceived intuitively.

17. How do the sensory impressions add to your comprehension of the literature?

In the first four lines, nature is represented in visual imagery. The dimensions of nature as represented by the squirrel, the eclipse, and the bumblebee are brought to the eyes. The second four lines add to the perception of nature through auditory images. The speaker uses the unusual juxtaposition of a bobolink, the sea, thunder, and a cricket to show the range of nature that can be perceived auditorily. The last four lines present an organic sensation to the reader since we can only perceive the truth of natural power internally.

18. What sound values do you find in your selection?

Throughout the poem, the same sound is returned to for rhyme: "see/bee/sea/Harmony/Simplicity." These five rhyming words occurring with regularity, lend expectancy to the poem even though there is no regular rhyme scheme. Alliteration is a frequent source of rhythm in the poem: "Hill/Heaven/hear/Harmony;" "Bumblebee/Bobolink." The alliteration and rhyming sounds bring harmony to the language of the poem just as nature as a benevolent force brings harmony to the world.

Questions dealing with the summation of the text

19. What can you discover about the writer's life and/or general outlook that is clearly relevant to the work you are analyzing?

With Thomas Johnson's Emily Dickingson: An Interpretive Biography (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1955) as a primary source, I found that as

Transcendentalism began to replace the tyrannical Calvinistic philosophy in New England, Dickinson reflected the Transcendental view that man, nature, and God all possessed the same divine spark. From her beliefs in the essential unity of all nature, she formulated her philosophy of the significance of nature.

20. What, in essence, is the implied author saying about the human condition?

Nature is first defined in terms of sensation in this poem. Nature is all the things the speaker sees and hears. Having described nature in this way, the speaker has not really defined nature, but has only dimly perceived the existence of the essential qualities of nature. What has been gained from the observation, of nature, however, is a self knowledge expressed in the last two lines.